

The New York Times

The Deal That Let Atlanta Retain Dr. King's Papers

By [SHAILA DEWAN](#)

Published: June 27, 2006

Correction Appended

ATLANTA, June 26 — It was in a short conversation over dinner, devoid of bargaining, that Mayor Shirley Franklin took the first step toward ensuring that a significant chunk of this city's patrimony would be returned here for good.

"She said, 'How much?' I told her the price, and she said, 'O.K.," recalled Phillip Jones, a King family representative who met with the mayor that day, June 18, to discuss the impending auction of the bulk of the papers belonging to the Rev. Dr. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

Late last Friday, a week before the auction was to be held at Sotheby's in New York, where the papers are on exhibit, officials announced a deal. With no collateral, Ms. Franklin had secured a privately financed loan of \$32 million allowing a nonprofit organization created by the city to stop the auction and buy the collection from the King family. The papers are to go to Morehouse College here, Dr. King's alma mater.

Dexter King, the younger of Dr. King's two sons, said he thought his father and mother, Coretta Scott King, who died this year, would have been happy with the arrangement.

"I actually felt that if Atlanta really could step up and do this, it would be so wonderful, and I'm personally grateful to the mayor as well as to Ambassador Young," Mr. King said of Andrew Young, who had been encouraging Ms. Franklin's efforts. "It really was a community effort, and that's what I appreciated most about it."

As with many of the King family's decisions, the prospect of the auction had brought grumbling among Dr. King's former associates, persistent critics of the family and city boosters who said Atlanta, his hometown, was the collection's rightful home.

Some had said the millions that the collection would fetch at auction was nothing but ransom that would go to the four King children, who have frequently provoked scorn for their handling of their father's legacy and the nonprofit center here that bears his name. Others had fretted that the collection — 10,000 items, most of which bear Dr. King's handwriting — would be sold to a private owner and lost to scholars, or to Atlanta, forever.

But none of Atlanta's institutions was prepared to muster the asking price for the papers, and it was rumored that New York City, among other parties, was prepared to compete for them. It was left to Ms. Franklin to take action. To ensure an advantage, she agreed to pay \$2 million more than the \$30 million for which the papers were appraised in the late 1990's.

"I didn't want to risk losing the papers over a million dollars," the mayor said in a telephone interview Monday. "To Atlanta they are priceless."

Mr. Jones, the King family representative, defended the price, saying, "Those in the know said to us over and over again: this auction, these papers are going to go way above the appraised value."

Still, some people whom Ms. Franklin approached for help thought the family should simply donate the papers. Dr. King's two sons had already been criticized for taking six-figure salaries from the King Center while it fell into disrepair and for aggressively defending their right to control their father's intellectual property. And in insisting on retaining the copyright, some scholars had complained, the family had made it hard for the papers to find an institutional home.

But archivists say such an arrangement is not unusual.

"It's a double standard," Dexter King said from his home in Malibu, Calif. If the family makes a point of retaining copyright, he said, "then all of a sudden we see in the media, 'The King family is greedy'; no, we're just following the historical standard."

Ms. Franklin said she had three points in response to people who thought the family should have given the papers away. "Dr. King copyrighted his own work," she said, "so he expected that it would have value and expected it would be part of the legacy. Mrs. King very much supported the sale of the papers to the appropriate institution. And the third thing that I say is that Dr. King left the rest of us a tremendous legacy, but he was not a wealthy man," and the bulk of his family's inheritance lies in his intellectual property.

In coming up with the necessary money, Ms. Franklin began to call in favors from a long list of Atlanta's major corporations and prominent citizens, including Delta Air Lines, Coca-Cola and Tyler Perry, author and star of "Diary of a Mad Black Woman." Ultimately, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, the developer Herman Russell, Turner Broadcasting and Cox Enterprises, the owner of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, also agreed to help.

Meanwhile, Mr. Jones told Sotheby's that he thought the family had a buyer.

The deal still requires some work, though: Ms. Franklin has secured only \$8.8 million in pledges; the rest of the money is in loan guarantees. Last Wednesday, David Redden, a vice president of Sotheby's, spoke to the mayor for the first time and asked whether, before the auction was canceled, she would be able to come up with the money. In reply, she cited one of her major accomplishments: raising \$3 billion to bail out the city's water system, which had been ailing for years.

During a week of intense negotiations, Ms. Franklin decided that the papers would go to historically black Morehouse College, which was attended not only by Dr. King but also by his father, grandfather and two sons. Morehouse, where Dr. King's funeral was held after his assassination in 1968, does not have its own archives, however, and so the collection will initially be housed at a library serving that college and several others.

The deal was hailed as a victory for Ms. Franklin. It was, The Journal-Constitution reported, a "classic Atlanta story — like winning the 1996 Olympics — of taking a near impossible challenge and galvanizing city support to make it happen."

Correction: June 29, 2006

An article on Tuesday about a deal secured by Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta to keep the papers of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the city referred incorrectly to the entity set up to buy the papers. A nonprofit organization, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, formed a company to purchase the collection; the city did not create a nonprofit organization.

Saving the King Heritage, Round One

Published: June 27, 2006

EDITORIAL

Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta did the nation an important service by pulling together a coalition of civic and business leaders to purchase thousands of documents belonging to Martin Luther King Jr., thus averting an auction that was scheduled to take place in New York this week. For the moment, at least, the last-minute deal (which gives Dr. King's heirs \$32 million) seems to have saved the slain civil rights leader's personal documents from falling into the hands of someone who might eventually have sold them off piece by piece as curiosities.

But buying the documents may have been the easy part. The Atlanta group must still deal with Dr. King's heirs, who have historically wanted to have their cake and eat it too — by continuing to exert undue control over the documents even after selling them. Beyond that, the task of preserving, housing, displaying and providing research access to the documents will be a large and costly undertaking.

For a look at how wrong things could go, consider the King Center in Atlanta, which was set up to commemorate Dr. King's legacy and to serve as a repository for the main body of his papers and others from the civil rights movement. In addition to being run-down and in need of repair, the King Center has suffered from shabby curatorial work and poorly conceived exhibits that have jeopardized its holdings and stripped it of significance as a civil rights history destination.

Dr. King's alma mater, Morehouse College, which has been given the lead role in overseeing the papers saved from auction, does not have the resources needed to preserve and display these documents. The curatorial effort will require the pooled resources — and imaginations — of nearby institutions like Emory University and the University of Georgia. All of the organizations involved will need to spend a great deal of money before this story can be deemed to have a happy ending.



Mayor's clout brings King papers to Atlanta

By Andrew Ward in Atlanta
Financial Times

Updated: 11:42 p.m. ET June 30, 2006

When David Redden, vice-chairman of Sotheby's, heard that the city of Atlanta wanted to strike a pre-auction deal to buy the Martin Luther King papers – a 10,000-strong collection of the slain civil rights leader's speeches, sermons, letters and notes – he needed to discover if the bid was serious.

"I got the mayor [Shirley Franklin] on the phone and said, 'Can you really pull this off?'" he recalls. "She said, 'I raised \$3bn to fix Atlanta's sewers. If I can do that, I can fix this'."

That conversation earlier this month was followed by two weeks of intense negotiations with the King estate as Ms Franklin, backed by Atlanta's powerful business community, fought to keep Mr King's papers in the city where he was born and laid to rest.

An agreement was eventually struck to buy the collection – described by Mr Redden as "the most important American archive of the 20th century in private hands" – a week before yesterday's planned auction for \$32m.

Among the highlights of the treasure trove: an early, annotated draft of Mr King's "I have a dream" speech.

The documents, hidden in boxes for most of the 38 years since their author's death, will be put on public display by Morehouse College, Mr King's alma mater. Ms Franklin hopes the collection will eventually form the centrepiece of a new civil rights museum.

Even before last week's deal, Ms Franklin was one of the most popular and highly rated mayors of any large US city, having been re-elected last November with more than 90 per cent of the vote. Her successful campaign to secure the King papers has reinforced her reputation as a woman who gets things done.

"This deal could not have happened without Mayor Franklin," says Andrew Young, a former Atlanta mayor and close ally of Mr King. "It needed her credibility to persuade so many businesses to support the bid."

Ms Franklin, a 61-year-old Democrat, persuaded SunTrust Bank, Atlanta's largest financial institution, to finance the bid with a \$32m loan, backed by promises of donations from many of the city's biggest companies, including Coca-Cola and Home Depot.

Atlanta has long prided itself on the strong ties between its white-dominated business sector and overwhelmingly black political leadership, dating back to its civil rights era reputation as "the city too busy to hate".

The alliance was forged in 1964, when Robert Woodruff, former president of Coca-Cola, organised a dinner for city business leaders to honour Mr King after he won the 1964 Nobel Peace prize. Such an event would have been unthinkable in most other southern cities.

This bridge-building approach is often cited among the reasons why Atlanta has become the region's wealthiest city over the past half century, boasting the world's busiest airport and a clutch of corporate headquarters.

But when Ms Franklin was elected mayor in 2001, the relationship between business and City Hall was at low ebb. Her predecessor, Bill Campbell, had run up an \$82m budget deficit and attracted a criminal investigation into alleged corruption. A jury cleared him of graft this year but convicted him of tax evasion.

Mr Campbell's mismanagement created a daunting challenge for his successor, a long-time city administrator. Four years later, Ms Franklin has restored public faith in Atlanta's government by fixing its finances, rooting out corruption and tackling long-neglected problems such as the crumbling sewer system.

With three years of her second term remaining, speculation is mounting about whether a bigger job could await her in state or national politics. With the Democrats desperate for credible candidates to help resurrect the party in the south, many believe Ms Franklin could be persuaded to run for the Georgia governorship or a Senate seat.

After viewing the King papers at Sotheby's in New York this week, Ms Franklin did not sound like a woman preparing for retirement. Visibly moved by the experience, she said: "It makes you want to do more."

Copyright The Financial Times Ltd. All rights reserved.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Deal keeps MLK papers in Atlanta

Maria Saporta - Staff
Saturday, June 24, 2006

Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin and a host of civic, education and business leaders have struck a deal with the family of Martin Luther King Jr. to buy an extensive collection of the civil rights leader's writings for \$32 million.

Dexter King, one of the four King children, confirmed the deal came together late Friday.

"I'm very happy about this most important and historic moment --- the fact that the papers are coming home and are going to be in a place where people can cherish and honor them," King said.

The deal ensures that the celebrated collection will not be auctioned by Sotheby's as planned in New York City on June 30 but will return to King's birthplace, which is also where King and his widow, Coretta Scott King, are entombed.

While Dexter King would not discuss details of the deal, others familiar with it said SunTrust Banks will provide a \$32 million loan for the transaction, which will be paid off with donations from a cross-section of influential Atlantans, businesses and local institutions.

This week, Franklin was busy securing donations and loan guarantees from more than a dozen individuals and companies. The donors and guarantors include Coca-Cola, Home Depot, Turner Broadcasting System Inc., entertainer Tyler Perry, former Gov. Roy Barnes, retired Georgia-Pacific Chief Executive Officer Pete Correll, developer John Williams and philanthropists Tom Cousins and Tom Glenn.

King's alma mater, Morehouse College, will own title to the collection. Morehouse President Walter Massey said the college will work with other local institutions to house, archive and display the collection. Those institutions could include Emory University, the Atlanta History Center, the University of Georgia or the Auburn Avenue Research Library.

Massey thanked the King family and Franklin for "seeing that these papers are returned to the most appropriate place in the world."

People close to the deal believe bringing the papers to Atlanta will also strengthen a growing effort to create a civil and human rights museum or a similar attraction with the King papers as the centerpiece. The museum effort has been pushed by Franklin, former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and others.

Coretta Scott King for years kept the collection in the basement of her west Atlanta home after her husband's assassination in 1968. Sotheby's first tried to sell the papers in 2003 for the King estate --- which at the time included Coretta Scott King, who died Jan. 30, and her four grown children: Dexter, Bernice, Martin III and Yolanda.

Historians consider the collection to be the most important American archive of the 20th century in private hands. They include 7,000 handwritten items, including drafts of King's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech and his "I Have a Dream" speech, which he delivered in 1963 at the March on Washington.

Sotheby's, which has been displaying the collection in Manhattan in anticipation of the auction, expected it to fetch between \$15 million and \$30 million at auction.

But Atlanta had an inside track because leaders negotiated directly with the King family.

The guarantors for the SunTrust loan include some of the city's most prominent companies and charitable institutions. The Georgia Power Foundation and the Southern Company Charitable Foundation each has guaranteed \$2.5 million.

"It's a stand-behind," said David Ratcliffe, CEO of the Southern Co. "Hopefully we won't have to cash the check," he said, referring to the hoped-for contributions that will help pay off the loan.

But Ratcliffe added that Georgia Power and Southern Co. likely would also make a cash contribution.

Jim Kennedy, chief executive officer of Cox Enterprises, said the media company, which owns The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, also would make a contribution.

"We have pledged \$1 million," said Kennedy. He said that because Martin Luther King Jr. was an Atlantan and "the real father of the civil rights movement, it seems so appropriate to have his papers in Atlanta. I think Shirley [Franklin] and Andy Young deserve a lot of the credit for pulling this all together." Young was among the first to insist that the city make an effort to acquire the collection.

Another contributor is businessman Herman Russell, who said he was making a \$1 million contribution and also offering a loan guarantee.

"I'm very proud of Atlanta," Russell said about the effort. He said earlier in the week he got a call from Aaron Rents founder Charlie Loudermilk, who said he wanted to contribute \$1 million to the cause. "It brought tears to my eyes," Russell said.

Contributions, however, didn't just come from Atlantans or local companies. Wal-Mart, based in Bentonville, Ark., is donating \$1 million to the cause.

Mike Duke, vice chairman of Wal-Mart who serves on the board of Morehouse and is a Georgia Tech graduate, said he received a call from Franklin on Thursday morning. "We were honored the mayor would even call us," Duke said. "We felt the way the mayor was positioning this, it was the right thing to do.

Those familiar with the intense negotiations over the week said Franklin had worked frantically to bring the business community together for a deal.

Atlanta historians and city leaders were quick to point out the importance of bringing the papers to Atlanta. The city is King's birthplace. It is where Coretta King raised her four children after her husband's death, and it is where she founded the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change to carry on his teachings.

But Atlanta wasn't the only city interested in the papers. Institutions that have had an interest in King's papers in the past include the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History at the New York Historical Society, the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, and Boston University, where King earned his doctoral degree.

Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), who worked alongside King and Young during the civil rights movement, said it would have been a shame if the papers had been "lost to New York or another area."

"There's been a sense of urgency because the auction is slated in one week," Lewis said Friday before the deal was finalized. "I know people have been working very, very hard to make it happen."

Dexter King confirmed that there were other potential buyers interested in making a private deal for the collection. But, he said, it was always the family's desire to have the papers in Atlanta.

"We didn't know that Atlanta was that serious until Mayor Franklin reached out. It's a sweet homecoming for me," King said. "I feel both my father and mother are smiling down on us."

MLK papers reveal the man

The last-minute purchase of Martin Luther King Jr.'s papers by an Atlanta coalition offers the public the chance to look into King's psyche in a new way for the first time.

BY AUDRA D.S. BURCH
aburch@MiamiHerald.com

NEW YORK - The many truths of Martin Luther King Jr. -- black man, husband, father, symbol, Southerner and a soldier for justice -- loom in a wide and white and especially quiet floor of Sotheby's International on York Avenue.

Here, where history and heritage often go to the highest bidder, an astoundingly complete portrait emerges of one the world's great social architects. Here, King is bountifully realized, often in his own cursive handwriting.

That this collection of King's papers, 10,000 items, some hidden and forgotten under the

sorrow of a widow's basement, was bought just 72 hours ago by a dogged Atlanta coalition that believed the textual evidence of King's legacy should come home to Morehouse College, his alma mater, is good news for some but somewhat beside the point.

It is the papers' revelations, the unearthing of King's manhood, the doors and windows into his psyche that are most precious -- and public, all in this 10th-floor gallery at Sotheby's in New York, for the first time. It is the newfound access, the chance to know more about a man who died nearly four decades ago on a Memphis balcony fighting to make things right.

"King was an absolute giant in history, easily one of the most important people in American history. This is an awesome opportunity to see how he thought, how his mind worked," said Michael Wenger, of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a national black think tank. "The more we understand about him, the more we understand about ourselves and our history."

The truth is, King was the greatest collector of our history, particularly from 1946 to 1968, when he rose from a seminary student to an Alabama preacher to a drum major for justice to a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

His widow, Coretta, who died January 30 of this year, lovingly safeguarded his legacy and only a decade or so ago invited Sotheby's to begin the arduous task of cataloging and chronicling King's life for an auction that in the end was canceled by the Atlanta coalition's purchase.

"More than anything, she told us she wanted the collection to go to an institution," said Elizabeth Muller, a vice president of Sotheby's Department of Books and Manuscripts, who has worked with the collection for nearly a decade. "She believed this was a national treasure that should be shared."

WIDOW'S HELP

Coretta helped, too, not just in identifying the documents but also by reliving an 18-month courtship, a 15-year marriage, and the depth of a 38-year hole left by death.

"I can still remember the day we found this one trunk. . . . She sorted through the stuff, and then she told us the story of how they met," Muller said.

King left behind about 7,000 manuscripts: papers and letters in his hand; academic works and tests and a library brimming with 1,000 books. He left behind his most famous works as they evolved in thought and language, including the *I Have a Dream* speech, the Nobel acceptance speech, and a letter from the Birmingham, Ala., jail. He left behind a sermon box, long kept in a file drawer in the King home library, stuffed with almost 100 Sunday sermons, notes and meditations. And the telegram inviting him to President John F. Kennedy's funeral; the telegram from Malcolm X offering armed assistance to King and others under the threat of violence; a postcard from Jesse Jackson.

This is a collection and a journey that offers more filters in which to view King: ironies, wit and incredible sadness, too.

King was a gifted orator who earned C's in public speaking and actually renamed his most famous speech, *I Have a Dream*. The speech, delivered to 250,000 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 28, 1963, was first called *Normalcy -- Never Again* as typed across the first page of an early draft.

King was a frequent flier who once traveled to 11 cities in 18 December days, and often carried a prayer book, Alka Seltzer and aspirin in a weathered briefcase, to ease the movement's physical toll.

He was also a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, carrying the leader's profound thinkings with him on a scrap of paper. After all these years, all the creases, it is still legible in King's handwriting.

"Gandhi speaks for us," King wrote, referencing the man whose nonviolent doctrines inspired him. "In the midst of death, life persists. In the midst of darkness, light persists. We can strengthen life by our personal acts, by saying 'no' to violence, by saying 'yes' to life."

King was a prolific scribbler, jotting down many of his most important works on napkins, checkbooks, church bulletins and programs.

"No paper was safe around Mr. King. If the paper was around, he was writing on it, taking notes," said Selby Kiffer, senior vice president of Sotheby's Department of Books and Manuscripts.

When four baby girls were killed by a bomb while attending Sunday School in a Birmingham church in 1963 -- the most horrific act of the Civil Rights Movement -- King delivered the eulogy for three of

them. The deaths didn't stop. The eulogy became a twisted template, and King would cross out the name of each victim, replacing it with the next. First the girls, then Jimmy Lee Jackson, then Rev. James J. Reeb.

At its most intimate, the collection includes the stuff of daily routines -- credit-card receipts, canceled checks, and perhaps most poignantly, the rejection letter and draft reply of the Kings to the Lovett School after young Martin III's application to enroll at the Episcopal elementary school was denied.

King was a doting daddy who worried about what all that jail time would do to his children. In a seven-page letter from an Albany, Ga., jail cell, King wrote: ``How do you explain to a little child why you have to go to jail. Coretta has developed an answer. She tells them daddy has gone to jail to help the people."

After years of talks, and five months after Coretta Scott King's death, the King children -- Dexter, Bernice, Martin III and Yolanda -- announced two weeks ago that the collection would be auctioned on Friday. This was Sotheby's second attempt to sell the collection since 2003.

RAISED MONEY

But in the days leading up to the auction, a group of Atlanta politicians, civil leaders, philanthropists and businesses decided that the collection belonged in the Southern city where King was born, baptized, schooled, ordained, married and buried.

Led by former Mayor Andrew Young and Mayor Shirley Franklin, the group bought the collection for \$32 million, just above the appraised value of \$15 million to \$30 million. Former President Richard Nixon's heirs sold the Watergate tapes and other presidential documents to the Justice Department for \$18 million. The Abraham Zapruder film, a 26.5-second clip showing the John F. Kennedy assassination, sold for \$16 million. James Joyce's manuscripts went to the National Library of Ireland for \$15 million.

The collection will go to Morehouse College in Atlanta, the nation's largest private liberal arts college for black men. Portions of the proceeds will benefit the King Center, founded by Coretta in 1968, to repair a myriad of maintenance problems.

"It is great that Atlanta is embracing its own history," Franklin said in a statement.

Young told The Associated Press, ``People have seen this as an opportunity to step up and lay claim to Martin Luther King's nonviolent heritage as a part of Atlanta's tradition. It really didn't belong anywhere else."